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CHINESE
STUDIES**
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The temptations and promotion of “China Dream”: calling for Africa’s home-grown rhetoric

Scholars have raised concerns that political rhetoric manifest in China-Africa relations tend to replicate China’s domestic ideals on the African continent. The exercise is witnessed in the coupling of the “Chinese Dream” and the “African Dream” in the rhetoric of China-Africa relations. In essence, the slogan “African Dream” is framed within the historical trajectory of “Chinese Dream” which articulates China’s reform policy implementation goals for the 21st century. The “Chinese Dream” is the first Chinese political slogan which has been witnessed to directly seek spaces and manifest beyond China’s domestic borders. Such manifestation deviates from China’s past political norms, that of limiting political propaganda to domestic consumption. One of the spaces used beyond China’s borders to promote the Chinese Dream has been the media; this includes African media outlets. Media groups such as CCTV international and Xinhua have African headquarters where they have partnered and co-operate with a variety of local media agencies. South Africa is no exception. The People’s Daily Online established a subsidiary company in South Africa and has linkages to the New Age newspaper, a state newspaper in South Africa. In addition, African academics, journalists and students have since 2013 been invited to China to participate in the “Chinese Dream” promotional events. It is within this context that the notion “Chinese Dream” has found fertile ground to manifest and even replicate itself on the African continent in the form of the “African Dream”. This policy brief discusses the domestic context of the Chinese Dream and analyses its extension into Africa in the form of the “African Dream”. It concludes with recommendations on the need to establish an African home-grown rhetoric that will help Africa maximise gains in the spaces provided by China’s paradigm shift and offer lessons that will better prepare China for its engagement in Africa.

Chinese Dream as an articulation of China’s Political Programme

The tradition of using all-encompassing slogans and “power-words” to mobilise, inform and educate the public about current policies is part and parcel of China’s political life. The “Chinese Dream” like all previous political slogans is meant to articulate ideals and goals of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It has been disseminated and taught at all levels of society through national, provincial, town and village party organs. Since inception, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has used the

tradition of slogans. During the rule of Mao Zedong, “Serving the People” was the flagship of a variety of slogans meant to guide, educate and re-educate the masses through a chain of revolutionary campaigns that took place between 1949 to 1978. However, the post Mao era witnessed a dramatic decline on political campaigns and slogans. Instead, each president has a concept which accompanies their term of office. The slogan “Four Modernisations” (1979 - 1988) is representative of Deng Xiaoping’s term of office, articulating the rationale for the state led open market system. The “Three Represents” (1990 - 1999)

under Jiang Zemin was meant to mitigate social and cultural changes that emerged from the "freedoms" resulting from the open market system. The "Eight Virtues and Eight Shames" (2000 - 2012) is representative of Hu Jintao's term of office and was coupled with the rhetoric of "Harmonious society" meant for mitigating foreign fears of China's rise. All these slogans including the most recent "Chinese Dream" are maxims which serve to articulate the way forward for China and manifest as vehicles for an all-inclusive policy implementation.

Emergence of the concept "Chinese Dream"

The phrase "Chinese Dream" was coined in 2013 by Xi Jinping as a slogan meant to articulate China's reform and opening-up policies as it allows the space for promoting individual dreams. President Xi Jinping has urged young people to dare to dream, work assiduously to fulfil the dreams and contribute to the revitalisation of the nation. The *Qiushi*, the party's theoretical journal, cites that the "Chinese Dream" is not about individual glory, but about collective Chinese effort. Li (2014), former vice president of the CPC Central Committee's Party School defines the goal of the "Chinese Dream" as building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way by 2020, and achieving modernisation by 2050. In short, the great rejuvenation is to achieve modernisation. The "Chinese Dream" is also in line with Deng Xiaoping's logic of pioneering the establishment of a *Xiaokang shehui*, "moderately well-off society". The Central Party School/Central Committee of the CCP defines the "Chinese Dream" as an articulation and a description of the set of ideals in the PRC.

The notion of the Chinese Dream may be understood to manifest at two levels. The "Chinese Dream" first manifests as a guideline for the reform policy implementation as it prescribes and proscribes the roadmap for China's future. Embedded in the articulation of the "Chinese Dream" is a historical collective memory spanning from a powerful ancient China that regarded itself as the centre of the world. The project of rejuvenation is meant for China to rid itself of "national humiliation" caused by the arrival of imperialist Western powers in China at the turn of the 20th century. President Xi Jinping describes the "Chinese Dream" as "national rejuvenation, improvement of people's livelihoods, prosperity, construction of a better society and military strengthening". The "Chinese Dream" domestically manifests as a converging point for national unity. The above description reveals that the slogan currently serves to promote the state-led Chinese rapid economic development. In China, the "Chinese Dream" is promoted on a variety of television programmes such as game shows, and soap operas. Similar trends are witnessed in popular culture outlets which traditionally tend to emulate the standard rhetoric of the status quo. There are books, posters with slogans all over the cities and villages of China publicising the "Chinese Dream" concept.

Semi-official events are organised as entertainment sanctioned through the minister of education where schools compete on subjects of patriotic education and moral conduct.

Export of PRC Political Rhetoric into Africa

The slogan "African Dream" as manifested in the China-Africa relations and Chinese media emerged during the promotion of the "Chinese Dream" in Africa. The Beijing Review, a weekly periodical which provides foreigners with an official view of the state of China frequently publishes a piece on "Chinese Dream". These efforts are in line with those of People's Daily Online, CCTV Africa, and Xinhua which spare no effort in emulating the promotion of the "Chinese Dream" to international shores, Africa included. The majority of China foreign media agencies partner with the host country media services. The CCTV international and Xinhua have their African headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya where they have partnered and co-operate with a variety of local media agencies. Zhang Yong, Vice-Director of External Communication Department of the People's Daily notes that, the development of the People's Daily is part of the "Chinese Dream". He stressed that, the People's Daily has the mandate to report and record the "Chinese Dream". The People's Daily Online has since 2011 established a subsidiary company in South Africa. It has also partnered with The New Age, a local newspaper in South Africa. In addition, African academics, journalists and students have since 2013 been invited to China to participate in the "Chinese Dream" promotional events. It is within this context that the notion "Chinese Dream" has found fertile ground to manifest and even replicate itself on the African continent in the form of the "African Dream".

Introduced by president Xi Jinping during his visit to Tanzania in March 2013, the president spoke of a dream of over 1.3 billion Chinese people for great national renewal and the dream of 1 billion African people for gaining strength and unity and achieving development and rejuvenation. China's turn toward a market economy and its growing economic engagement on the African continent, particularly since the 2000's, has been accompanied by a new set of ideological terms. However, in many respects, post-Mao political slogans echo earlier socialist rhetoric. Terms such as "win-win", "harmonious co-operation" and "brotherly assistance" are frequently used in official Chinese discourse toward Africa; these terms have also been adopted by certain African governments themselves to articulate their national ideals within and beyond China-Africa relations forums. Such tendencies reflect the fact that "made in China" political rhetoric has gained traction in Africa.

The primary locus for the transfer of Chinese slogans such as the "Chinese Dream" into Africa was the China-Africa relations forums. The intensified and closer relations between Africa and China have witnessed yearly visits from Chinese dignitaries,

Box 1.

Pairing of the “Chinese Dream” and “African Dream” by Mr. Lu Shaye, Director-General of African Department of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013.

- The Chinese Dream and the African Dream both espouse values of peace. China has forged a national character of harmony and faithfulness with all neighbours and a national culture of openness and inclusiveness to other cultures. Similarly the African people hope for stability and peace. With common ideals, similar historical experiences and a shared need for development, China and Africa both pursue stability and peace in their dreams.
- The Chinese Dream and the African Dream both prioritize national development. Development and prosperity are the common aspiration and historical mission of China and Africa. The same task for development gives China and Africa a common ground and greater scope for cooperation. China and Africa are highly complementary in economy, presenting important development opportunities to each other.
- The “Chinese Dream” and the “African Dream” are both for greater strength through independent efforts. A similar suffering under colonial oppression has made the two peoples of China and Africa to value independence and self-reliance. China and Africa respect the principle of non-interference in other's internal affairs.
- The “Chinese Dream” and the “African Dream” are both for rejuvenation. China and Africa had great past civilizations and made great contributions to mankind as a whole. China and Africa fell behind when capitalist mode of production and modern industries emerged. China and Africa must increase mutual learning in the process of rejuvenation between the Chinese and African civilizations and strengthening mutual learning in the process of rejuvenation and join hands to realize set dreams.

Comparisons such as one above are favoured within and beyond China-Africa relations forums by Chinese dignitaries visiting Africa. The central theme of such rhetoric is usually framed within the following logic: “In general African friends do not see China's development as a threat. The “Chinese Dream” for the Chinese nation is to achieve national rejuvenation and the “African Dream” for African people is to achieve poverty reduction and development. Each can help the other”.

resulting in another platform for the transfer of Chinese political rhetoric into the African continent. Recent examples are the visits by the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, to Africa, during which he announced China's yearly engagements in Africa for the current year. The rhetoric used in these announcements is similar to that applied when announcing China's domestic policy implementations. Minister Wang announced that, “China is ready to work hard to make Africa's dream of building a high-speed railway network come true”. In 2013, Wang Xijun, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the “Chinese Dream” is similar to a good dream of people around the world and has the same root and quality as the dream of the African people. He concluded by stating that the consistency of the “Chinese Dream” and “African Dream” determines that the two people can work together to realise the dream. In 2013 the Director General of African Department of China's Ministry of foreign affairs addressing a seminar “Chinese Dream” stated that the dream is in consistence with the beautiful dreams cherished by people of other countries and, in particular, highly consistent with the “African Dream”. In the same breath he stressed that the “Chinese Dream” is a blueprint drawn according to the historical trajectory of China. He went further to draw parallels between the “Chinese Dream” and the “African Dream” (See Box 1). In such statements, detected is the streamlining of Africa's needs to Chinese political rhetoric and ideals. It would

stand to reason that statements made by government ministers from China carry the CCP-loaded political rhetoric. However, it raises concern when members of the African elite apply rhetoric strategies similar to those applied by Chinese dignitaries. One such example is that by the former United Nations (UN) Deputy Secretary-General, Asha-Rose Migiro, who went on record, stating that the “Chinese dream” has received immense appeal in Africa as it conjures a vision of collective achievement that the continent is striving to reach. She cites poverty alleviation, economic growth, and attainment of sustainable development as the African ideals expressed within the notion of the “Chinese Dream”.

The tendencies are also perpetuated by Chinese and African media in both localities. In China newspapers such as China Daily, Xinhua, People's Daily carry articles with titles such as “Africans in China sharing ‘Chinese Dream’”, “‘Chinese Dream’ and ‘African Dream’ resonate”, “Academics help shape multitude of dreams”, “African media attends seminar on ‘Chinese Dream’ and ‘African Dream’” just to mention a few. Members from mainstream media outlets from a variety of African countries; Liberia, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe make frequent visits to China's national media houses to learn and discuss latest rhetoric used by China such as in the case of “Chinese Dream” and “African Dream”. Comments from the majority of African journalists visiting China reflect an

understanding of the "African Dream" that is framed by the articulations of the "Chinese Dream". Such replication of "China Dream" expressed as "Africa Dream" is rife in both Chinese and African media.

Concluding remarks

Since the year 2000, China-Africa trade relations intensified to unprecedented heights. The development was welcomed by a variety of African countries who regarded China as an equal partner. The growth in trade between Africa and a fast developing China led to a discussion of "what Africa can learn from China". The discussion and a search for developmental lessons from China seem to have fuelled the promotion of Chinese political rhetoric in China-Africa relations. Such promotion may be discerned in the tendency of combining the "Chinese Dream" with the "African Dream". The tendency of articulating and combining the "Chinese Dream" with the "African Dream" seem to have extended into scholarship of China-Africa relations, especially in the discussions of China's soft power in Africa. The articulation of an "African Dream" within the framework of the "Chinese Dream" is reflective of asymmetry in China-Africa power relations.

The use of the "African Dream" within the framework of "Chinese Dream" may read as a step by step approach by China's soft power in Africa. However, a critical approach reveals an export of Chinese political ideology into Africa. The manner in which the Chinese political rhetoric manifests on the African continent risks fermenting a neo-colonial thesis preferred by those threatened by the Chinese presence in Africa. Such an outcome is favourable to neither China nor Africa.

China needs to be cognisant that the rhetoric of China-Africa relations is to a greater extent limited to the political elite. China should not assume that just because elites in Africa embrace terms such as the "Chinese Dream" to a certain degree, that this necessarily resonates with the general African population. Furthermore, African elites need to think carefully how such terms fit or not with indigenous rhetoric development. Also, the articulation of the "African Dream" within the framework of the "Chinese Dream" omits political freedoms such as democracy which is the backbone of many post-colonial African states. The African continent should use the spaces provided by current global paradigm shifts for re-formulating and articulating solutions congruent to its value systems.

Recommendations

- Borrowing traditional cultural concepts from a distant and foreign culture to articulate local ideals, coupled with the

assumption that a homogeneous Africa could result into sustainable development is tantamount to political euthanasia. Politicians, academics, analysts and observers of China-Africa relations need to distance themselves from replicating a discourse that is solely reflective of China's history and ideals. The South-South co-operation forums such as FOCAC and BRICS, and local African frameworks, such as the African Union (AU), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) need to serve as platforms of empowerment and produce a discourse which delivers greater public goods, in tune with local value systems meant to empower the entire African community.

- In the case of South Africa, it would be beneficial to package its current diverse cultures and ideology into a robust easily articulated rhetoric that would then serve as a framework for developing its own nation. Such rhetoric would help streamline the entire South African society to a variety of national markets. Furthermore, the suggested rhetoric would help to teach China about South Africa and its people. Articulation of a "South African dream" should reflect South African home grown ideals, instead of the imported exclusively ambiguous and lukewarm "African dream" witnessed in Sino-Africa relations.

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